

2018

A Corpus Analysis of the Syntactic Distributions of the Verb 'GET' : Meanings and Usages

Barbara Kennedy
barbara.century@gmail.com

Ettien Koffi
St. Cloud State University, enkoffi@stcloudstate.edu

Glynis Perschke
gperschke@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: http://repository.stcloudstate.edu/stcloud_ling



Part of the [Applied Linguistics Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Kennedy, Barbara; Koffi, Ettien; and Perschke, Glynis (2018) "A Corpus Analysis of the Syntactic Distributions of the Verb 'GET' : Meanings and Usages," *Linguistic Portfolios*: Vol. 7 , Article 3.
Available at: http://repository.stcloudstate.edu/stcloud_ling/vol7/iss1/3

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by theRepository at St. Cloud State. It has been accepted for inclusion in Linguistic Portfolios by an authorized editor of theRepository at St. Cloud State. For more information, please contact modea@stcloudstate.edu, rswexelbaum@stcloudstate.edu.

A CORPUS ANALYSIS OF THE SYNTACTIC DISTRIBUTIONS OF THE VERB <GET>: MEANINGS AND USAGES

BARBARA KENNEDY, ETTIEN KOFFI, AND GLYNIS PERSCHKE¹

ABSTRACT

This paper is a corpus analysis of the syntactic distributions of <get>. We examine the 198 most common usages of <get> based on Corpus of American Soap Operas (CASO) databanks, a subset of the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA). We also provide 12 subcategorization frames to account for all the syntactic environments in which <get> occurs in the database. This comprehensive investigation confirms that <get> is unique among all English verbs by the sheer number of complements that it selects. Its varied uses and its frequency of occurrence in everyday English make <get> a hard verb to master for native and non-native speakers alike. Non-native speakers may not understand many of the idiomatic expressions and collocations involving <get>. Native speakers, on the other hand, may not be aware that a fair amount of its usages and collocations are too informal. Consequently, care should be used when <get> appears in academic writing. We first analyzed the numerous uses of <get>, only then did we categorize usages from CASO/ COCA. Some of the usages that we did not find in either CASO or COCA.

1.0 Introduction

According to *Online Etymology Dictionary*, <get> derives from Old Norse <geta> and was introduced into English around 1200 A.D. It has a broad range of meanings, including "to obtain, to reach, to be able to, to beget, to learn, to be pleased with, etc." It is currently the 12th most commonly used verb in the English language (Koffi 2015:210). *Webster New Universal Unabridged Dictionary* (1993) lists 63 primary uses of <get>. Some of the entries have additional sub-entries. The investigation of the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) shows that <get> selects at least 12 types of complements. The paper is structured around these 12 complements. Twelve tables displaying various occurrences of <get> and corresponding synonyms are provided. This is an attempt to show that many of the collocations involving <get> are too informal for academic writing. In most cases, a sample sentence is used and diagrammed to represent the prototypical usage of <get> and its complement(s).

1.1 Classifications of the Complement Types

In traditional grammar, a verb is labelled "transitive" if it can take a direct object. Some transitive verbs such as <purchase> must necessarily occur with a direct object. However, other verbs, such as <eat>, even though they are transitive, may not have their direct objects overtly stated. In the latter case, grammarians say that <eat> is used absolutely. An intransitive verb is a verb that does not take any direct object. Such is the case of the verb <sleep>. In most of its common usages, it is an intransitive verb. If an object appears with <sleep>, the object is preceded

¹ **Authorship responsibilities:** Barbara Kennedy is the first author to the extent that the topic of this paper originated with her. She collected all the COCA data. Etienne Koffi is the second author to the extent that he has thoroughly revised the initial paper and rewritten nearly all facets of it to make it publishable. He also designed and populated all the tables and provided all the subcategorization frames. Glynis Perschke is listed as the third author because she co-wrote the original paper with Barbara and diagrammed all the sentences except one.

by a preposition, such as “*sleep in the bedroom.*” Ditransitive verbs are those that select a direct object and an indirect object as their complements. The verb <put> is an excellent representative of verbs in this category. The phrase <put the car in the garage> exemplifies this usage. A stative verb is one that generally selects an adjective or a subject complement as its complements. For example, <become> can be followed by an adjective or a noun in the phrases <become angry> and <become a linguist>.

The verb <get> is unique among English verbs because it can select the aforementioned complements and others. Subcategorization is an analytical tool that contemporary syntacticians use to formalize the relationship between verbs and their arguments. A subcategorization frame is a formal apparatus introduced by Generative Grammar to “mirror” how the verb appears in the mental lexicon. This is a theoretical statement, not a description of what actually happens in the brain. Since this may be a new concept for some readers, the formalism used to depict verbs in the mental lexicon needs to be explained before moving forward with the rest of the discussion. A fuller explanation of the formalism is discussed in Koffi (2015:85-7). Suffice it for now to exemplify how subcategorization actually works by using the verb <eat> as an example:

Eat, V [_____ (NP)]

First, the lexical item that is subcategorized is listed, followed by a comma, followed by the part of speech, followed by an opening square bracket. Next to the left square bracket is the place holder. This is the place where the verb <eat> occurs. After the place holder, we see the NP. There are parentheses around it. The parentheses mean that NP may or may not occur. If it occurs, the subcategorization is as follows:

Eat, V [_____ NP]

If it does not, we have this subcategorization:

Eat, V [_____]

According to traditional grammar, if a transitive verb does not occur with its direct object complement, the verb is said to have been used “absolutely.” With this brief explanation, we now turn to our analysis of the syntactic distributions of <get>, as found in the COCA database.

2.0 <Get> Used Absolutely

In rare instances, do we encounter <get> used absolutely. It is subcategorized as follows:

Get, V [_____]

In such an instance, it has the illocutionary force of an imperative. A sentence such as <get!> is synonymous with <leave immediately!>. However, this usage is uncommon. We did not find it in COCA. Instead of simply saying <get!>, people would nowadays say <Get out!> and <Get going!>. In the first case, <get> is used intransitively, as discussed below. In <get going>, <get> selects a present participial subordinate clause. The latter usage is discussed in 9.3.

2.1 <Get> Used as an Intransitive Verb with Adverbs

The meaning of <get> changes rather drastically depending on the adverbial collocations with which it occurs. The semantic properties of the adverb contribute a great deal to the meaning. This can be illustrated by the examples in Table 1.²

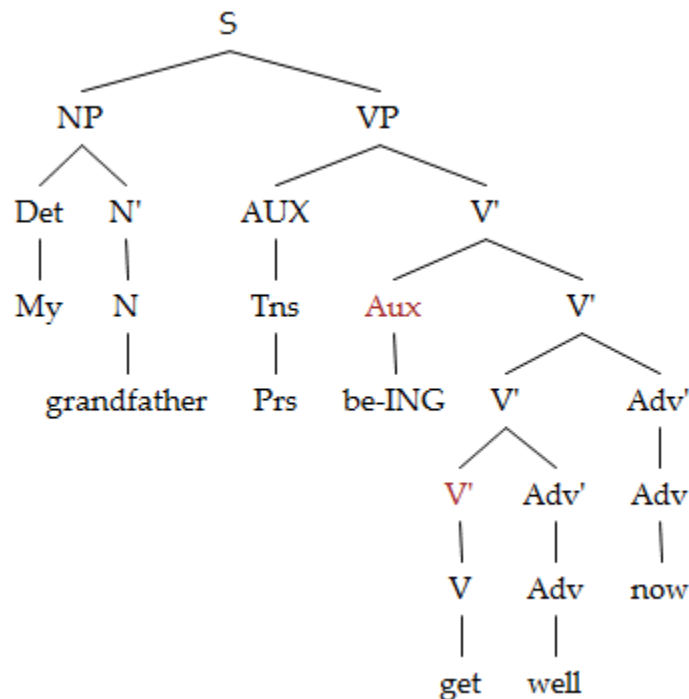
No	Adverbial Subcategorization	Meaning
1.	get away	escape, isolate yourself from
2.	get here/there	arrive here/there
3.	get inside	come/go into
4.	get out	leave
5.	get up	arise
6.	get well/better	improve
7.	get worse	decline

Table 1: Adverbial Subcategorization

These usages of <get> can all be subcategorized as follows:

Get, V [_____ Adverb]

The sentence <My grandfather is getting better> is diagrammed to illustrate the adverbial complement(s) that are used with <get> in the COCA database:



² The equivalent meanings of all the “get phrases” were provided by the first author.

2.1 <Get> Used as a Stative Verb

Stative verbs are those that select an adjective for their complements. The prototypical stative verbs of English are the copula/linking verb <be> or by the stative verb <become>. Koffi (2015:210) lists 13 other English verbs that can function as stative verbs. When <get> is used as a stative verb, it can be subcategorized as follows:

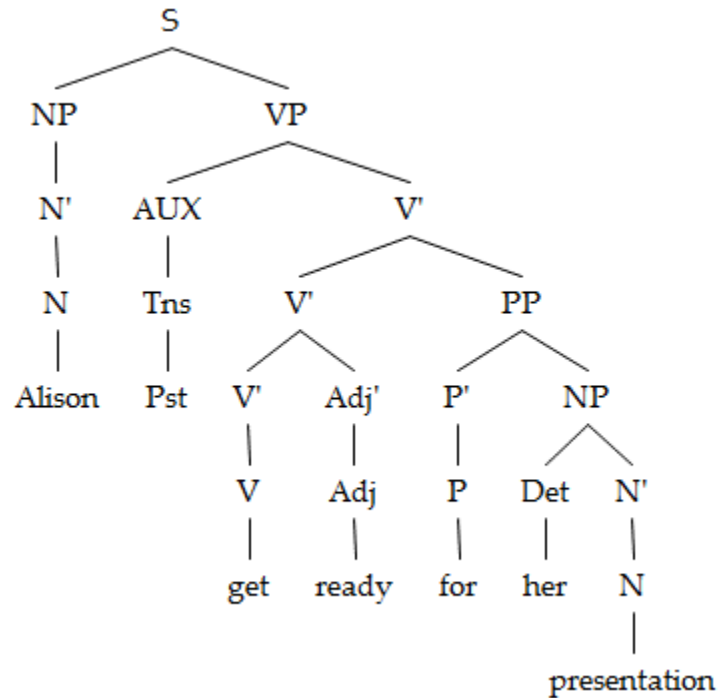
Get, V [_____ Adjective]

The collocations that occur in COCA are the following:

No	Adjectival Subcategorization	Meaning
1.	get caught up in the moment	lose oneself in the moment
2.	get caught up on my homework	catch up on my homework
3.	get done	finish
4.	get dressed	dress
5.	get laid up (with the flu)	be sick in bed (with the flu)
6.	get married to	marry
7.	get older	become older/age
8.	get ready	prepare (oneself)
9.	get rid of	dispose of
10.	get sick/drunk/tired	become sick/drunk/tired
11.	get soft/hard	soften/harden
12.	get started	start/begin
13.	get stuck in traffic	become stuck in traffic
14.	get stuck with someone	be stuck with someone
15.	get bored	become bored

Table 2: Adjectival Subcategorization

The tree diagram of <Alison got ready for her presentation> illustrates how <get> used as a stative verb is diagrammed:



3.0 <Get> Used as a Transitive Verb

The COCA database has 49 examples illustrating the use of <get> as a transitive verb. In all these usages, <get> is necessarily followed by an NP or a pronoun. Phrases such as <I get it now> or <I don't get it> occur with high frequency in conversational English. For academic writing, phrases such as <I get it now> or <I don't get it> should be replaced with synonyms such as <I comprehend/understand it now> or <I don't comprehend it/understand it>. When <get> selects a direct object complement, it is subcategorized as follows:

Get, V [_____ NP/Pro]

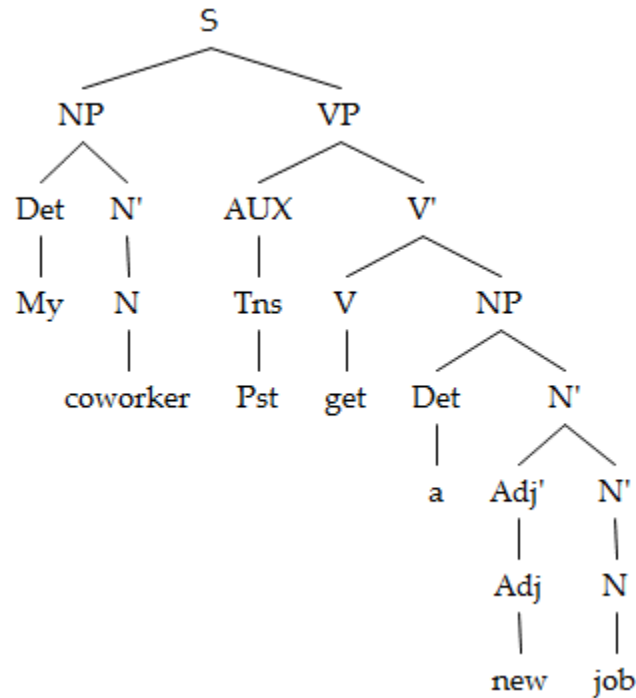
Table 3 illustrates the numerous uses of <get> with this subcategorization:

No	Transitive Subcategorization	Meaning
1.	get \$300 for the job	charge \$300 for the job
2.	get \$40,000 a year	earn \$40,000 a year
3.	get (one's) revenge	take revenge (on someone)
4.	get a (good) grade	attain/receive a (good) grade
5.	get a bead on	watch/to spy on somebody
6.	get a degree	obtain/attain a degree
7.	get a feel for	intuit/have an intuition for
8.	get a funny feeling about	have second thoughts about
9.	get a good photo of	take a good photo of
10.	get a good view of	have a good view of
11.	get a haircut	have one's hair cut

12.	get a homerun	hit a homerun
13.	get it	understand
14.	get a job	obtain, start, be offered a job
15.	get a joke/the punchline	understand a joke/punchline
16.	get a letter/an email	receive a letter/an email
17.	get a read on (the situation)	read (the situation)
18.	get a sense of/get an idea of	understand
19.	get a start on	start
20.	get a taxi	call a taxi
21.	get a thrill out of	become excited about/by
22.	get a vaccination	be given a vaccination
23.	get an idea of	start to understand
24.	get clearance for take-off	receive clearance for take-off
25.	get data	find/generate data
26.	get flowers for one's anniversary	receive flowers for one's anniversary
27.	get help	go for help
28.	get his phone number	ask for/obtain a phone number
29.	get many hits	receive many visitors
30.	get one's way	<?>
31.	get permission	receive/be granted permission
32.	get questions about	have questions about
33.	get questions from my students	receive questions from my students
34.	get some rest	rest
35.	get some students (in one's class)	have some students (in one's class)
36.	get someone's perspective on	ask for someone's perspective on
37.	get tenure	receive tenure
38.	get that license plate number!	find out/write down ...!
39.	get that radio station here	receive that radio station here
40.	get the bus	catch the bus
41.	get the experience of	have the experience of
42.	get the gist	understand the gist
43.	get the idea from that article	be inspired by that article
44.	get the opportunity	have/be offered the opportunity
45.	get the phone	answer the phone
46.	get the run-around	be evaded
47.	get the wrong idea about	misunderstand
48.	get their products to market	market their products
49.	get wine with dinner	have/order wine with dinner

Table 3: Transitivity Subcategorization

The sentence < My coworker got a new job > is diagrammed to exemplify this use of <get>:



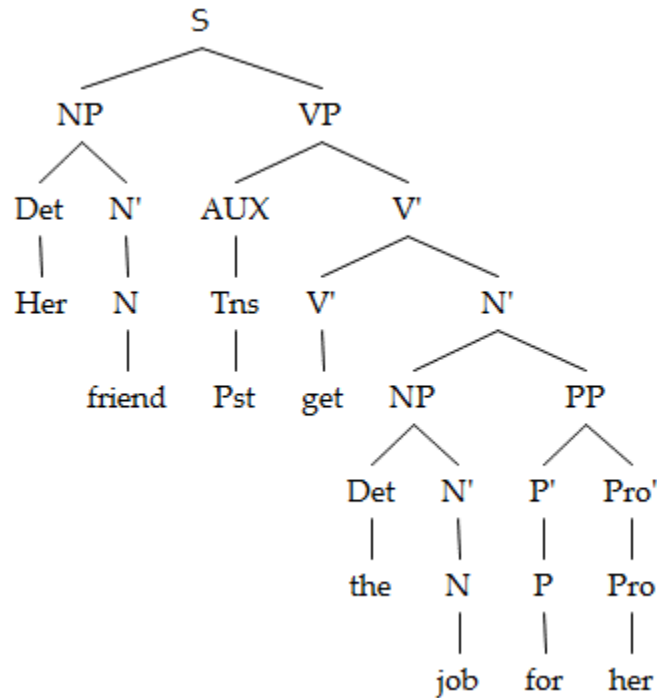
4.0 <Get> Used as a Ditransitive Verb

According to traditional grammar, ditransitive verbs are those that can select two complements, a direct object and an indirect object. Sometimes the preposition that precedes the indirect object is deleted. The diagrammed sentence, <Her friend got the job for her> can also appear as <Her friend got her the job>. The latter is the result of a number of transformational operations. First, the phrase <the job> is the direct object is moved and placed after the prepositional phrase <for her>. Subsequently, the preposition <for> is deleted. Ditransitive verbs of this type can be subcategorized in one of two ways, as shown below:

Get, V [_____ NP1 PP], where PP is rewritten as P NP2

Get, V [_____ NP2 NP1]

The sentence in which the preposition phrase occurs is deemed the base sentence, as diagrammed below:



One would expect that the COCA corpus would have many sentences of this type. However, this usage of <get> is not as frequent as one would expect. Table 4 displays the most common collocations in the database:

No	Ditransitive Subcategorization	Meaning
1.	get permission for/to someone to	obtain permission to/for someone to
2.	get a job for someone	find a job for someone
3.	get a scissors for someone	procure/bring a scissors for/to someone
4.	get flowers to/for someone	give/buy flowers to/for someone
5.	get help to/for someone	obtain help for someone
6.	get the message to/for someone	send/pass the message on to someone
7.	get word to someone	let someone know

Table 4: Ditransitive Subcategorization

5.0 <Get> Used with an Adjectival Complement

In some instances, <get> selects a direct object, and the direct object is itself modified by an adjective. In traditional grammar, constructions in which an adjective modifies a direct object are known as adjectival complements. These are cases where <get> functions similarly to verbs such as <make>, <prove> or <consider> in phrases such as <make it right>, <prove her wrong>, <consider this inappropriate>. These usages of <get> are subcategorized as follows:

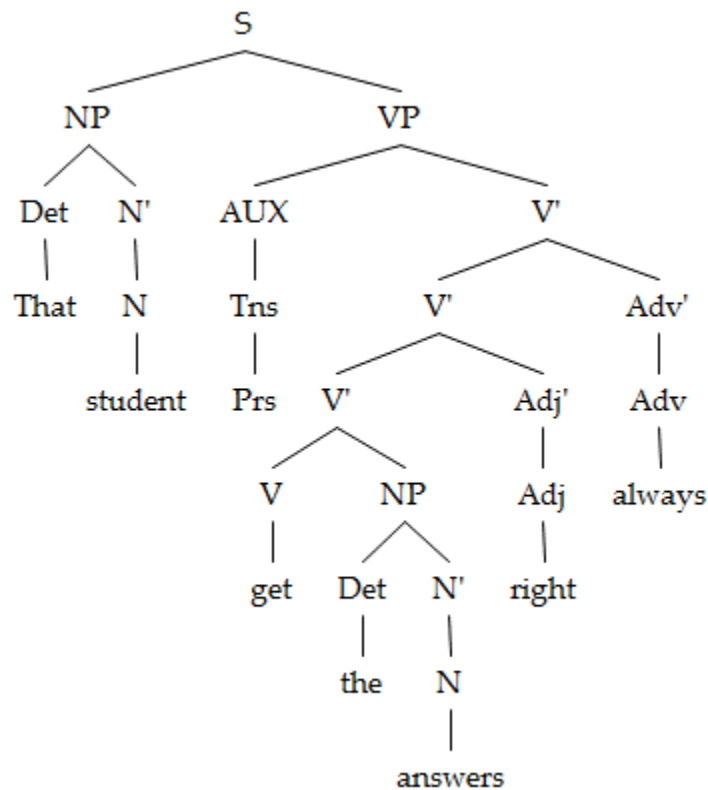
Get, V [_____ NP Adjective]

The amount of constructions in COCA illustrating this usage is considerably smaller, as shown in Table 5:

No	Adjectival Subcategorization	Meaning
1.	get something wrong	misunderstand something
2.	get (an answer) right/wrong	be right/wrong on that answer
3.	get (something) right/wrong	succeed/fail at (something)
4.	get (someone) upset/angry	make (someone) upset/angry
5.	get the story straight	understand/ state the facts correctly

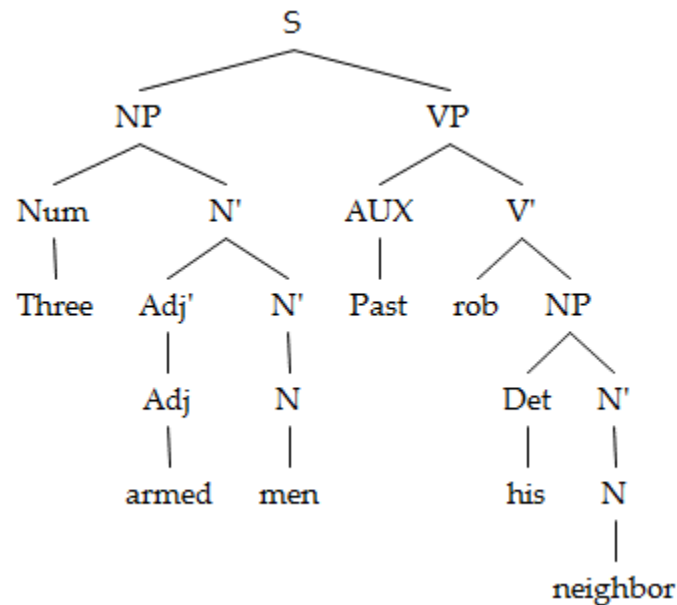
Table 5: Subcategorization with Adjectival Complements

The typical tree diagram of when <get> selects an adjectival complement, such as in <That student always gets the answers right>, is diagrammed as follows:



6.0 <Get> Used in the Passive Voice

English has two grammatical voices: the active and the passive. Some syntacticians hold that the active voice is the base form, the one found in the deep structure. Those who take this view contend that all sentences in the passive voice are derived from several derivations in the transformational process, namely two movements rules, the addition of Be-EN, and the addition of the preposition <by>. These uses resemble the passive construction with <be-EN>. So, the sentence <His neighbor was robbed by three armed men> is derived from <Three armed men robbed his neighbor>. The based sentence is diagrammed as follows:



There are also syntacticians who contend that passive constructions can be derived directly by phrase structure rules without the need of transformations (Koffi 2015:179-181). From this standpoint, when <get> occurs in passive constructions, it can be subcategorized as follows:

Get, V [_____ Verb-EN (by NP)]

In such constructions, <get> is followed immediately by another verb carrying the past participial suffix <-EN>. When Spell-Out rules apply, <-EN> becomes <-ed> if the verb is regular. For most irregular verbs, it surfaces as <-EN>. In some instances, the past participial form is the same as in the past tense. All three instances are illustrated by the examples in Table 6:

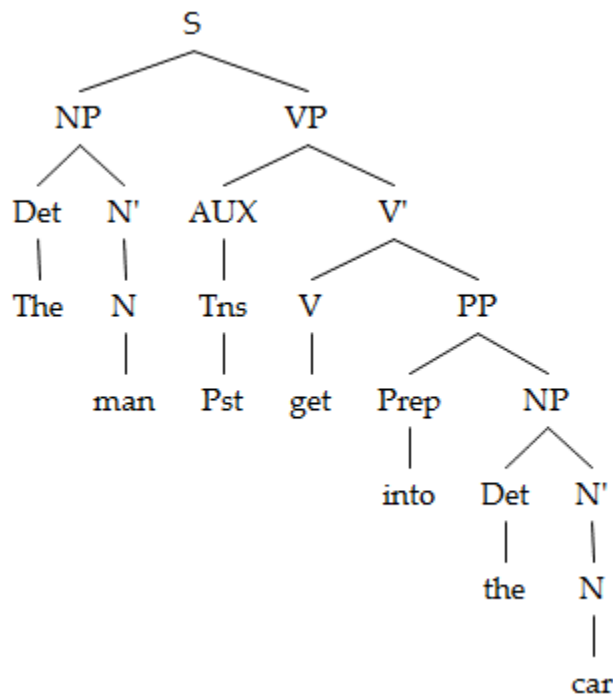
No	<Get> in Passive Constructions	Meaning
1.	get beaten (by someone)	be beaten (by someone)
2.	get hit (by the ball)	be hit (by the ball)
3.	get laid off/fired (by someone)	be laid off/ fired (by someone)
4.	get arrested (by the police)	be arrested (by the police)
5.	get threatened (by someone)	be threatened (by someone)

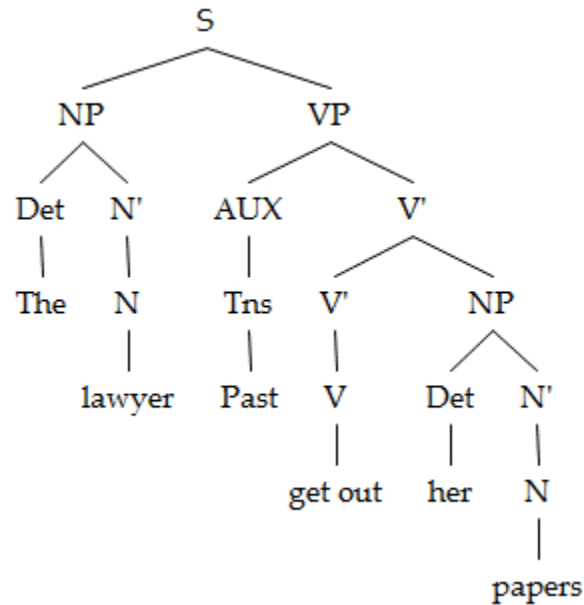
Table 6: Subcategorization with Passive Constructions

The subcategorization frame has “by NP” between parentheses because in many instances, <get> is used in agentless passive constructions, that is, the agent is unknown or is left unspecified for stylistic reasons.

7.0 <Get> Used in Prepositional Phrases and Phrasal Verbs

A syntactic distinction is made between prepositions and particles. Prepositions are intimately associated with noun phrases, while particles go with verb phrases. In English, prepositions precede noun phrases. In other words, wherever there is a preposition, there also is a noun. In a few instances, there is a preposition but no noun is found nearby. In traditional grammar, such “prepositions” are not prepositions after all. They may be adverbs or particles. Koffi (2015:305-24) notes that particles are preposition look-alikes that occur most of the time within a phrasal verb. Some particles seldom occur in noun phrases. Koffi (2015:328, Table 13) lists the 14 or so that occur in English. When particles occur with phrasal verbs, Koffi uses various syntactic tests to differentiate them from prepositions. Tree diagrams of sentences containing prepositions and particles in the verb phrase look different, as shown by <The man got into the car> and <The lawyer got out her papers>. In the first sentence, <get> selects a prepositional phrase. In the second, <get> selects a phrasal verb:





Both usages of <get> can be subcategorized as follows:

Get, V [_____ PP], where P is a Preposition and NP is an indirect object

Get, V [_____ P NP], where P is a particle and NP is direct object

COCA presents us with a very long list of instances where <get> selects either a prepositional phrase or a phrasal verb. No attempt is made here to determine which usage is which because doing so would involve performing syntactic tests on each collocation. Readers who want to find out where the “preposition” is really a preposition or a particle should refer to Koffi (2015) and learn how to apply the various distinctive tests. We are content just listing the 78 collocations found in COCA in Table 7:

No	<Get> with Prepositions and Particles	Meaning
1.	get (a) hold of someone/something	connect with/find someone/something
2.	get (something) down one’s throat	swallow (something)
3.	get (something) over with	have (something) done
4.	get across an idea	communicate an idea
5.	get across	traverse
6.	get after (someone) for misbehaving	scold (someone) for misbehaving
7.	get ahead in life	succeed in life
8.	get ahead on the assignment	work ahead on the assignment
9.	get along with her	be on good terms with her

10.	get along	move along
11.	get along	be cooperative
12.	get around doing the work	avoid doing the work
13.	get around (someone)	avoid (someone)
14.	get around the obstacle	circumvent the obstacle
15.	get around to everyone	see everyone/call on everyone
16.	get around to making the calls	start making the calls
17.	get at	imply/insinuate
18.	get away from	escape from
19.	get away with insulting them	be allowed to insult them
20.	get away	escape
21.	get back at	avenge (oneself on)/take revenge on
22.	get back (from)	return (from)
23.	get back in/into shape	exercise, become fit again
24.	get back into teaching	go back/return to teaching
25.	get back one's book	receive one's book back
26.	get back one's money	be reimbursed
27.	get back to something	go back/return to something
28.	get behind something	move behind something
29.	get behind someone	support someone
30.	get behind on the paper	become behind on the paper
31.	get by (with little money)	survive (on little money)
32.	get by with talking back	not be punished for talking back
33.	get down	descend
34.	get in all the material	cover all the material
35.	get in an insult	slip in an insult
36.	get in the last shot	take the last shot
37.	get in touch with	contact
38.	get in/into a rut	become stuck
39.	get in/into the house	enter/go in the house
40.	get into an argument	become involved in an argument
41.	get into that school	be accepted into that school
42.	get into/onto/on that topic	start in on that topic
43.	get off onto other topics	go off onto other topics
44.	get off the phone	hang up the phone
45.	get off the sofa	move off the sofa
46.	get on it right away	do it right away
47.	get on that show	be accepted on that show
48.	get on the phone	talk/pick up the phone
49.	get on with what you're doing	continue with what you're doing
50.	get out a pen	take out a pen
51.	get something out of being sarcastic	benefit from being sarcastic
52.	get out of that assignment	avoid that assignment

53.	get out of that sentence	understand in that sentence
54.	get out of the way	move out of the way
55.	get out the splinter	remove the splinter
56.	get out	leave
57.	get over the break-up	recover from the break-up
58.	get over the hill	climb over/traverse the hill
59.	get over there	move over there
60.	get past that car	pass that car
61.	get past that incident	leave that incident in one's past
62.	get someone (back) for that put-down	take revenge for that put-down
63.	get the bike in the car	put the bike in the car
64.	get through the crowd	move through the crowd
65.	get through a difficulty	make it through a difficulty
66.	get to someone	upset someone
67.	get to it!	start!
68.	get to that question	address that question
69.	get to the question	start the question
70.	get to that stage	reach that stage
71.	get to the bottom of	discover/find out the cause of
72.	get to the destination	arrive
73.	get to the point	be direct
74.	get together (with)	meet (with)
75.	get up on (something)	climb up on (something)
76.	get up the nerve to	build up one's courage to
77.	get up	arise
78.	get with the program	pay attention

Table 7: Usage with Prepositions and Particles

8.0 <Get> Used with Compound Prepositional Phrases

The particularity of this use of <get> is that it is followed by a compound prepositional phrase. Koffi (2015:311-2) makes a fine distinction between compound and complex prepositional phrases. The former has to do with prepositional phrases that contain two prepositions before the noun phrase, whereas the latter has more than two words (the preposition “in” and the noun “spite”). The phrase <across from> illustrates the first type, while <in spite of> is an example of the latter. The COCA database did not contain examples of the latter in conjunction with <get>. For the former, there are only two instances, and both have to do with <out of>. The subcategorization phrase is presented as:

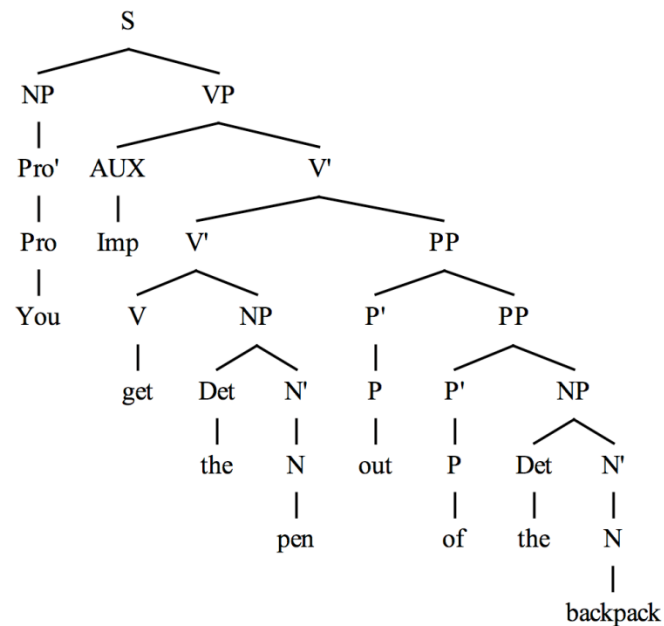
Get, V [_____ NP P P NP], where both Ps are compound prepositions

The collocations we found in COCA are in Table 8:

No	Compound Prepositional Phrase Subcategorization	Meaning
1.	get (someone) out of a situation	Extricate (someone) from a situation
2.	get (something) out of the backpack	take (something) out of the backpack

Table 8: Ditransitive Subcategorization with Particles

The sentence <get the pen out of the backpack> is diagrammed as follows:



The PP is shown that it is compound because it dominates two different prepositions, <out> and <of>. Both are necessary to insure the grammaticality of the sentence. Having only *<You get the pen out the backpack> is just as ungrammatical as *<You get the pen of the backpack.> All the constituents of compound and complex prepositional phrases must occur in tandem. Otherwise, the sentence becomes ill-formed.

9.0 <Get> Used in Complex Clauses

Up until this point, all the sentences involving <get> are used in simple sentences. In the remaining sections, we will examine instances where <get> selects subordinate clauses. In contemporary syntax, the following are classified as complex clauses (2015:20-1, 386-402):

1. To-Infinitive clauses
2. Present participial clauses
3. Past participial clauses

In all such cases, <get> can be subcategorized as follows:

Get, V [_____ CP], where CP stands for “complementizer phrase”

In sentences of this type, the complementizer is often the subordinating conjunction <that>. However, as we will see shortly, other types of subordinate clauses occur in COCA without being necessarily headed by an explicit subordinating conjunction. Another important syntactic characteristic of these three constructions is that the subject of the subordinate clause is PRO. In contemporary syntax, a distinction is made between PRO and Pro (Koffi 2015:394). PRO refers to the subject of the subordinate clause that occurs before To-Infinitive clauses, present participial clauses, and past participial clauses. This PRO does not have any phonetic realization. Small “Pro” on the other hand, refers to all types of pronouns.

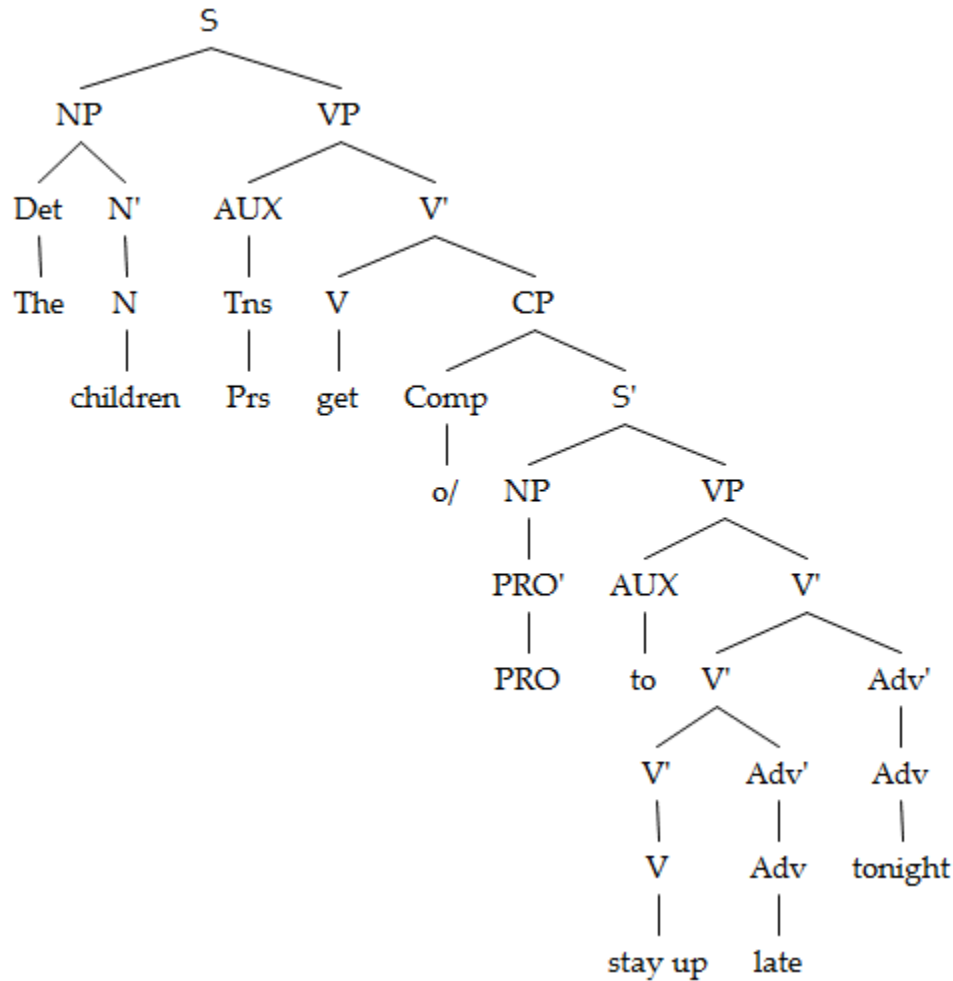
9.1 <Get> Used with To-Infinitive Subordinate Clauses

In some of these sentences, the verb <get> is followed immediately by a second verb that begins with “to.” In such cases, the subject in the main clause is identical with the subject of the subordinate clause. However, since the verb is not conjugated, its subject is “big” PRO. In other constructions, <get> is followed by an NP before the To-Infinitive clause begins. In such sentences, the subject of the verb in the subordinate clause is the NP that follows <get> in the main clause. Such constructions are known as causative constructions. We see this in Table 9 in examples 5 to 9:

No	To-Infinitive Clauses	Meaning
1.	get to know someone	come to know someone
2.	get to see that opera	have the opportunity to see that opera
3.	get to sleep in	can sleep in
4.	get to stay up late	be allowed to/be permitted to stay up late
5.	get (someone) to do the hardest job	induce (someone) to do the hardest job
6.	get (someone) to edit the paper	find (someone) to edit the paper
7.	get (someone) to study Spanish	induce/convince(someone) to study Spanish
8.	get (something) to happen	make (something) happen
9.	get (something) to work	make (something) work

Table 9: Subcategorization with To-Infinitive Clauses

In the sentence <The children get to stay up late tonight>, PRO refers back to <The children>. Sentences of this type are diagrammed as follows:



9.2 <Get> Used with Past Participial Clauses

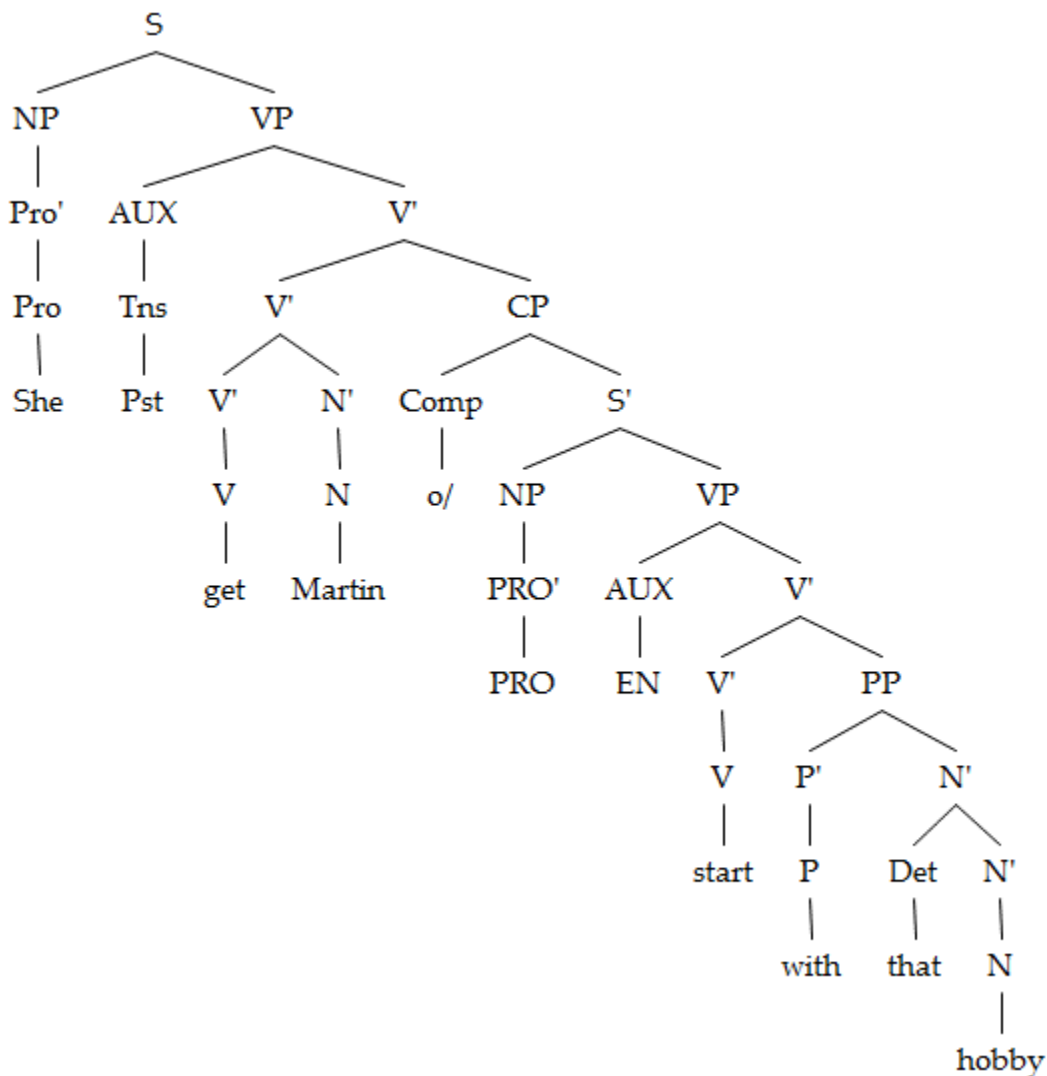
When <get> is used in the past participle, if it is not followed immediately by an NP, then the subject of the subordinate clause is the same as the subject of the main clause. However, if it is followed by an NP, that NP becomes the subject of the subordinate clause. To illustrate these two usages, let's consider the following pair of sentences: <Bob got connected> and <Bob got Mary connected>. In the first instance, PRO in the subordinate clause refers back to <Bob>, whereas in the second sentence, PRO refers back to <Mary>. There are not many collocations of this type in COCA. The ones that we found are listed in Table 10:

No	Past Participial Clauses	Meaning
1.	get connected with	connect someone with
2.	get someone connected with	Connect someone with someone else
3.	get dressed	dress oneself
4.	get someone dressed	dress someone else
5.	get started reading	begin reading
6.	get someone started reading	help (someone) learn to read

7.	get used to something	habituate oneself to something
8.	get someone used to something	Habituate someone else to something

Table 10: Subcategorization with Past Participial Clauses

In the following sentence, <Martin> is the subject of the verb in the subordinate clause. However, in <She got Martin started with that hobby>, the instigator of the new hobby is <she>, the subject of the verb in the main clause.



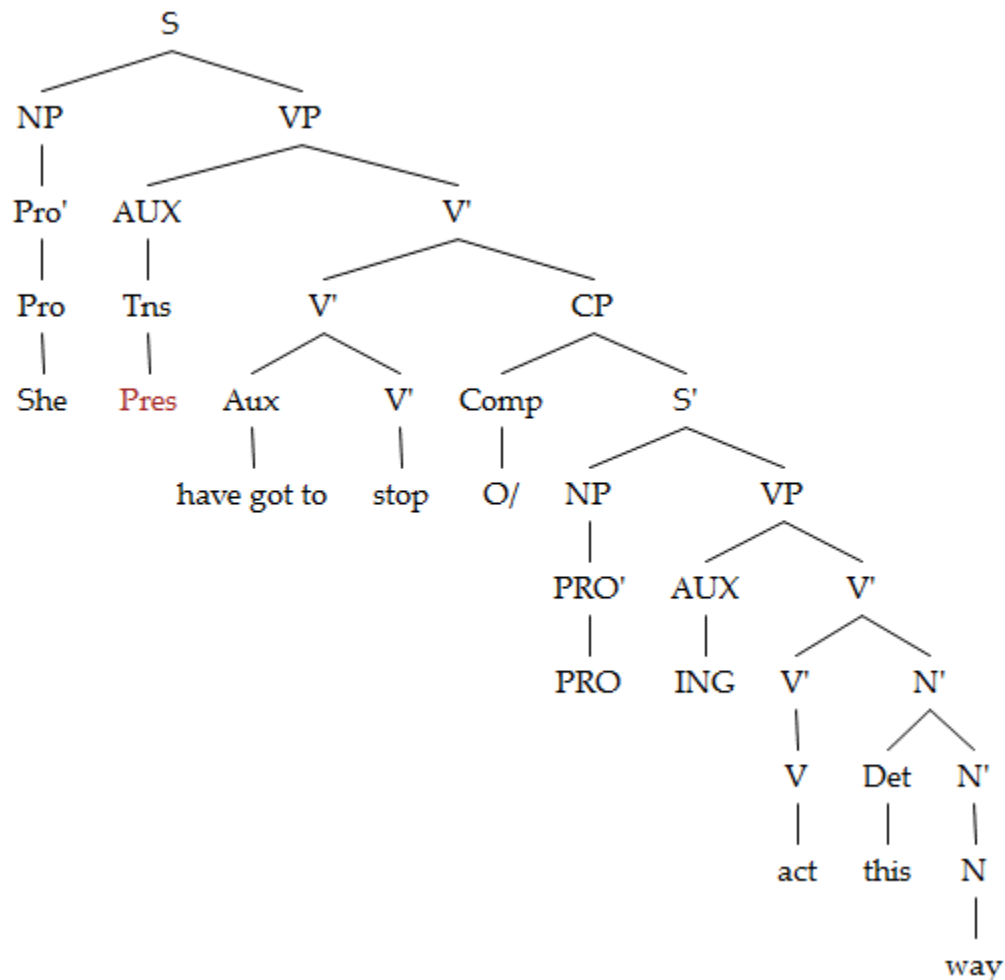
9.3 <Get> Used with Present Participial Clauses

The uses of <get> that select a present participial subordinate clause are identical with what was discussed in the previous paragraph. The only difference is that the verbs in the subordinate clause have an <-ING> suffix instead of an <-EN> suffix. The COCA database has far fewer usages of this grammatical construction. The ones that we found are listed in Table 11:

No	Present Participial Clauses	Meaning
1.	get (everyone) working together	organize (everyone) to work together
2.	have got to stop doing something	must/have to stop doing something
3.	get (someone) thinking	inspire (someone) to think
4.	get to feeling bad about	start/begin to regret
5.	get going	continue, start moving
6.	get moving	continue, start moving

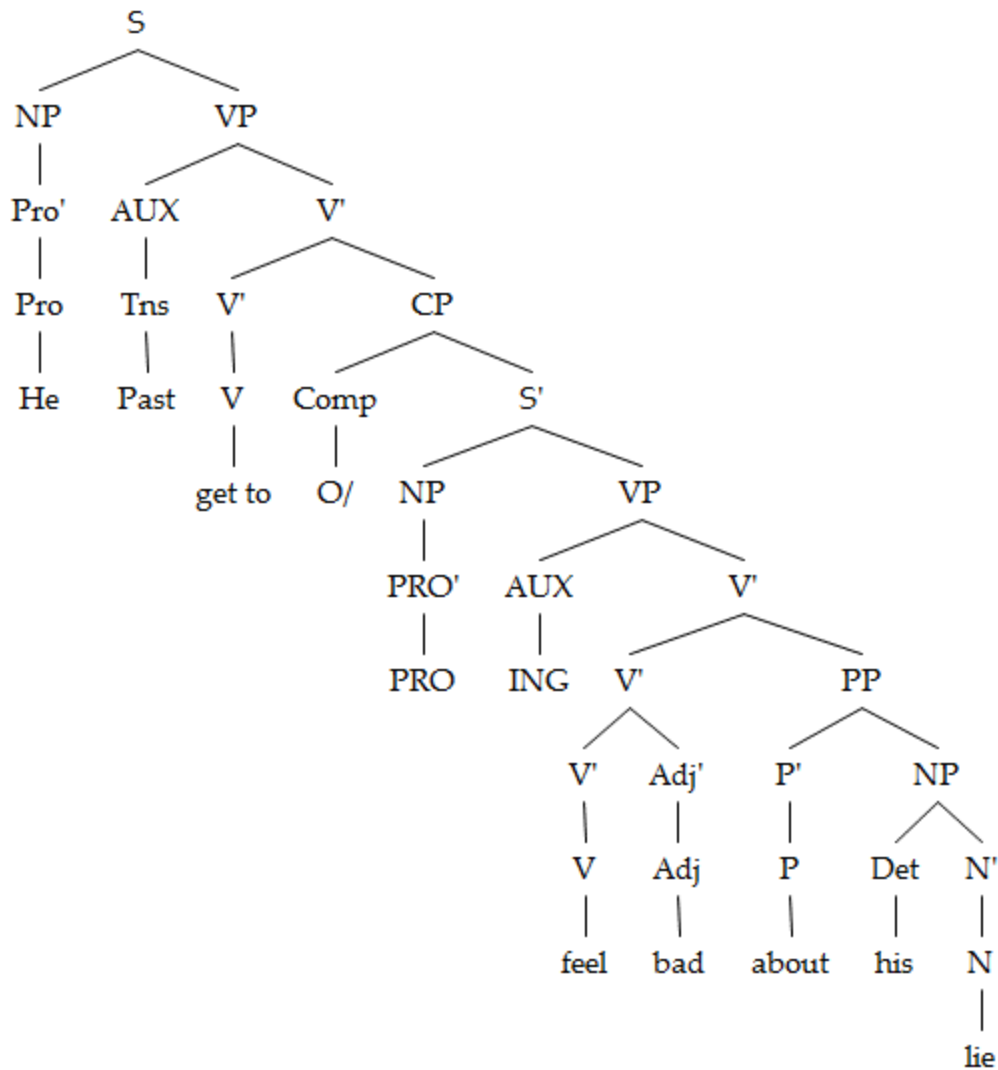
Table 11: Subcategorization with Present Participial Clauses

The sentence <She got to stop acting this way > is diagrammed as follows:

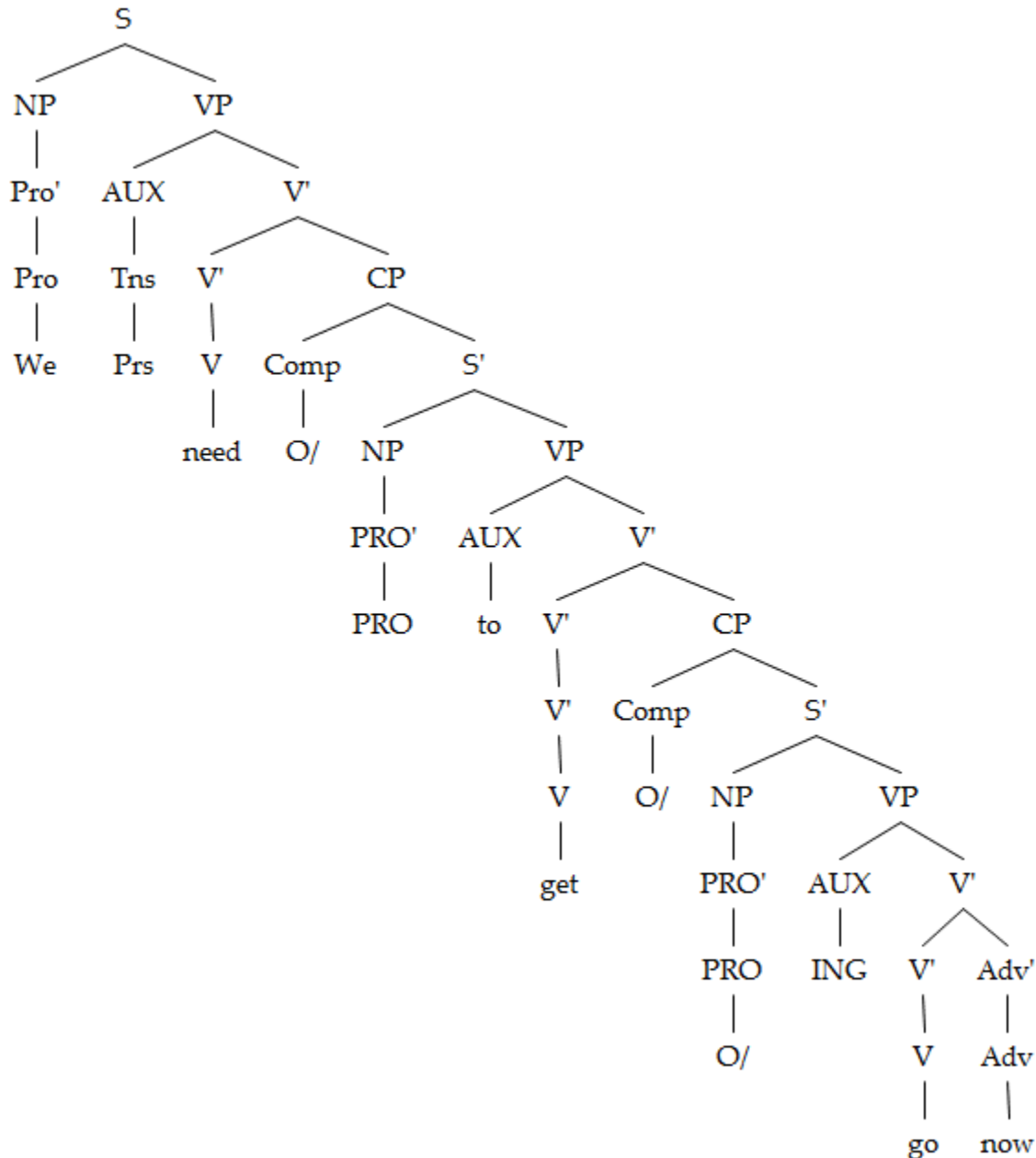


We assume that <Have got to> is a complex modal phrase that functions just like <must> or <have to>. Another construction which is similar to <have got to> is <get to>. In COCA, <get to> seems

to be used primarily with verbs of cognition and feeling. The sentence <He got to feeling bad about his lie>, in which <get to> occurs, is also diagrammed here:



A subset of <get> used with present participial subordinate clauses is seen in collocations such as <get going> or <get moving>. They denote a sense of urgency. A sentence involving <get going>, <We need to get going now>, is diagrammed to show that, even though this construction appears simple on the surface, it is indeed a complex sentence:

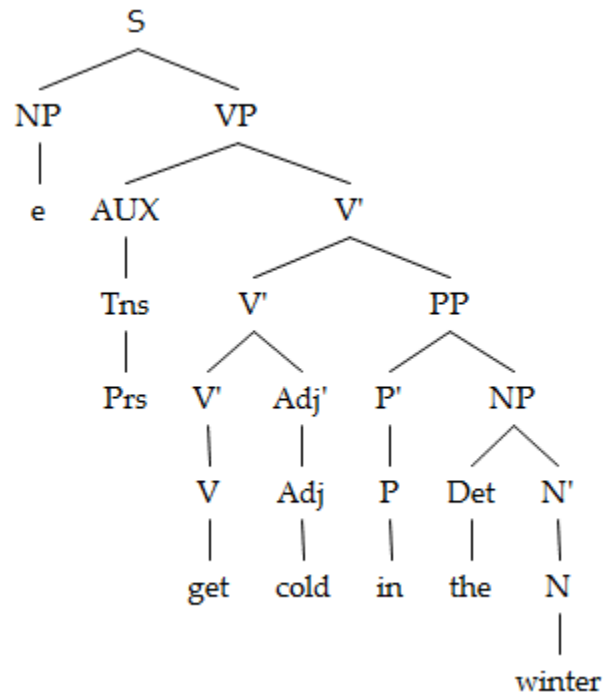


10.0 <Get> Used in Extraposition

The verb <get> is involved in some complex constructions that syntacticians describe as extraposition (Koffi 2015:407-8, 472). To illustrate this usage, let's examine the sentence <It gets cold in the winter>. The counterpart of this sentence is <Winters are cold>. If we assume that <It gets cold in the winter> is derived from <Winters are cold>, then we must make a number of assumptions. We use the following derivational steps under this assumption:

Deep Structure: winter PL, Present Be cold
 Movement Rule: _____ Present Be cold winter PL
 Be-Deletion: _____ Present \emptyset cold winter PL
 Get-Addition: _____ Present get cold winter PL
 Preposition Insertion: _____ Present get cold in winter PL
 Spell-Out Rule: _____ gets cold in the winter
 Surface Structure: *gets cold in the winter

We have skipped several minor details in order to focus on the main points. <*gets cold in the winter> is an ill-formed sentence in English though its equivalent is perfectly acceptable. It **is** ungrammatical in English because every finite verb, i.e., every conjugated verb, needs an explicit subject. English is not a Pro-drop language like Spanish. So, to make the sentence acceptable, the rules of English require that <It> be used as the subject of <get>. This subject is called “dummy” <It> because it contributes nothing to the meaning of the sentence. It is there just to make sure that the construction is grammatical. The movement rule that moved <winter> from the subject in the deep structure and placed it at the end of the sentence in the preposition phrase is called “extraposition.” Various forms of extraposition call for the use of the dummy <It>. The extraposed sentence is diagrammed as follows:



In the COCA database, we came across the following collocations:

No	<Get> with Extraposition	Meaning
1.	it gets cold in the winter	winters are cold
2.	it gets dark earlier now	it turns dark earlier now
3.	it gets dicey	it becomes tricky
4.	it gets me upset when that happens	it makes me upset when that happens
5.	it gets tricky to parse sentences	it becomes tricky to parse sentences
6.	it got her talking to ask the right question	she started talking when I asked the right questions
7.	when it gets to be October	when October comes/ begins

Table 12: Extraposition uses of <Get>

It is clear that some of the uses of <It> cannot be readily attributed to extraposition. For example, one would be hard pressed to find the deep structure equivalent of <It gets dicey> or <It gets dark earlier now>. Even so, other constructions of this type can be easily derived from an underlying form if we assume that extraposition has a role in such constructions.

13.0 Summary

This paper makes four important contributions to the syntax of high frequency verbs in English. First, it uses corpus data to exhaustively investigate the usages of <get> in everyday spoken English. Secondly, it employs the syntactic tools used by syntacticians to summarize the 200 uses of <get> into only 12 subcategorization frames. We posit conclusively on the basis of the COCA database that most of the contemporary uses of <get> fit within these 12 subcategorization frames. Thirdly, since most of the usages of <get> are rather informal, we provide substitutes that are acceptable for academic writing. We pursue no prescriptive agenda, but we want native and non-native speakers to be aware that some usages are too casual for academic discourse. Instead of writing <What I'm getting at in this paper>, students would do well to use several equivalent synonyms in their papers. The fourth merit of this paper is that it offers numerous tree diagrams to illustrate the 12 different ways <get> is subcategorized and used in real sentences.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Barbara Kennedy, M.A. in Hispanic Literature and Culture from the University of Minnesota and B.A. in Spanish from Macalester College, teaches Spanish and ESL at Century College, MN. She has also designed and taught French and Women's Studies courses and co-designed a global studies program and introductory course. As an interpreter/translator, she translated anthropological and other documents into Spanish and interpreted for medical appointments. During the 1980s, she was a Peace Corps Volunteer in rural public health in Ecuador. She can be reached at barbara.century@gmail.com.

Ettien Koffi, Ph.D., is a professor of Linguistics at St. Cloud State University, Minnesota, USA. His current research interests center around sociophonetic variations in Central Minnesota English, acoustic phonetic accounts of intelligibility in L2 English, and general acoustic phonetic descriptions of Anyi, a West African Language spoken in Cote d'Ivoire. He is the author of four books and numerous papers covering topics as varied as syntax, sociolinguistics, translation,

language planning and policy, orthography, and indigenous literacy training manuals. He can be reached at enkoffi@stcloudstate.edu.

Glynis Perschke, MA-candidate in TESL at St. Cloud State University, Minnesota, has a BS in Environmental Studies from St. Cloud State University, a BFA from Minneapolis College of Art and Design, as well as AA degrees in Computer and Interactive Graphics and Water Environment Technologies. She has designed and taught science classes for the St. Paul Science Museum, art classes for the Minneapolis College of Art and Design, and numerous classes for other programs. As an AmeriCorps volunteer, she has served as a reading tutor. She can be reached at gperschke@gmail.com.

Corpus Sample of Usage of Get

The following sample comprises one hundred instances of use of <get> from the Corpus of American Soap Operas, a subset of the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA). We chose this particular corpus, consisting of 100 million words, because it represents very informal, contemporary speech. Each utterance of <get> is shown in context. In the fourth column is the letter that corresponds to the usage of <get> as delineated above.

CLICK FOR MORE CONTEXT				SAVE LIST	CHOOSE LIST	CREATE
				NEW LIST	SOAP100	[?]
<u>1</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>A</u>	F B C			before. Ryan: Yes, we have, but this time we're going to get it right. Gillian: This time our vows will be final and forever. Ryan:
<u>2</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>A</u>	H B C			with no guests. But those who loved you, they wanted to see you get married in style. Gillian: Well, we didn't want to make a big
<u>3</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>A</u>	I B C			Leo. Please, this is what I want. Judge: And now we can get back to the business at hand. David: Your honor -- Mr.-O'Neal David, let
<u>4</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>A</u>	J B C			want you to know why I did it. Jake: Tad, you need to get Dixie out of here. Tad: Not yet. Mr.-O'Neal Your honor, I'd
<u>5</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>A</u>	J B C			second that you spent loving me. Jake: For God's sakes, Tad, get Dixie out of here. David: I didn't come here to confess today.
<u>6</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>A</u>	I B C			. Greenlee: Ok, scratch the getaway. But, come on, let's get out of here. I don't want to see you parading around an exercise
<u>7</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>A</u>	I B C			of course. Closes her eyes Who are you? How the hell did you get into my head? # Dixie: Everything you said about loving me was a lie
<u>8</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>A</u>	J B C			Leo: Oh. How's that going? You're going to be able to get him off, right? Mr.-O'Neal Oh, well, it's a little too

9	20	A	D	B	C	pre-nup? Who are you really trying to protect me from? Don't you get it, du Pres? I know you love me -- just me, not
1	20	A	I	B	C	Oh, you're the best. Bianca: And Laura, I promise you will get over Leo. Laura: I'll get over him, but I'll never get
1	20	A	I	B	C	Bianca: And Laura, I promise you will get over Leo. Laura: I'll get over him, but I'll never get him out of my heart. #
1	20	A	J	B	C	get over Leo. Laura: I'll get over him, but I'll never get him out of my heart. # Greenlee: Daddy, what are you doing here
1	20	A	I	B	C	Roger: Oh, it's my loss. Leo: And I'm sure you'll get over it. Roger: Youth can be so unforgiving. Leo: You know, I
1	20	A	D	B	C	this campus really make that much of a difference? J.R.: You just don't get it, do you? Why don't you just pack me a peanut butter
1	20	A	I	B	C	don't know all the facts. (Bell-rings) ## J.R.: I've got to get to class. Mr.-.St.-Clair Not so fast, Mr. Chandler. You're on
1	20	A	I	B	C	block. Adam: J.R. has learned that there's more than one way to get ahead. Dixie: Ah, yes, by lying and cheating. Adam: Come on
1	20	A	K	B	C	he wants to live with. Dixie: Junior is a child. He doesn't get to make those decisions. Adam: No, no, he's a young man
1	20	A	I	B	C	why aren't you? Roger, I gave you half a million dollars to get out of town. Roger: Half a million would hardly keep me in coffee and
1	20	A	D	B	C	to instill certain values in your children as parents. Then the first opportunity they get , they reject every dirty, rotten thing you ever stood for. Vanessa: Ok
2	20	A	I	B	C	ever stood for. Vanessa: Ok, Roger. Ok, you're trying to get back at me, aren't you, for not coming up with the whole

<u>2</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>A</u>	I	B	C	made some mistakes, but so have you. Both of us just have to get over ourselves and make sure that J.R. knows that he comes first with us
<u>2</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>A</u>	D	B	C	is the security of a stable home life. Dixie: And he's going to get that from you? Don't make me laugh. Adam: Liza and I and
<u>2</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>A</u>	I	B	C	sheets with Dr. Hayward. Dixie: I believe that my son and I can get past that. # Adam: Why don't you just leave him where he is
<u>2</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>A</u>	I	B	C	to be skeptical about people who try to kill me. Greenlee: You really should get over that. Don't you want to celebrate my perfect happiness with Leo?
<u>2</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>A</u>	I	B	C	? Opal: Yeah. Frederick: Oh, ok. I'm sorry I didn't get back to you. I was -- well, I was helping to organize the
<u>2</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>A</u>	L	B	C	belong now. Gillian: Fine. Let me go in. Jesse: Not till we get this Opal mess straightened out. Gillian: I made a mistake. Jesse: Oh,
<u>2</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>A</u>	F	B	C	I'm supposed to be your guide. But you are doing your best to get me busted back to square one! Gillian: Because you never tell me enough!
<u>2</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>A</u>	K	B	C	. Like this task I have to perform. If I do that, I get to be with-Ryan-- Jesse You will be with Ryan in time. Gillian: Well, there
<u>2</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>A</u>	D	B	C	needs me? Jesse: So you just destroy anybody, right, long as you get what you want? Gillian: I'm sorry. Jesse, I'm so sorry
<u>3</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>A</u>	C	B	C	. Adam: Yeah, well, don't go overboard. Hayward's bound to get suspicious. Mia: Look, I know how to play this game, all right
<u>3</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>A</u>	D	B	C	Opal would try to make contact now with the other side, all she'd get would be static. Ryan: So, wait a minute. She said you're
<u>3</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>A</u>	C	B	C	know you were coming. J.R.: I had to, Mom. Please don't get mad. Dixie: Well, I'm not mad. I mean, I just

3	20	A	J	B	C	. J.R.: My God. Is that what Hayward meant? Dad's going to get Hayward out of jail. Great. Uncle Palmer -- Palmer: Junior, are you
3	20	A	C	B	C	this kind of thing. Kaye: I know. That's why I can't get enough of you, Adam. # J.R.: What room is he talking about?
3	20	A	J	B	C	will know. Dad? (**32;64;TOOLONG) Adam: J.R.! (Door-closes) Adam: J.R. J.R.: Get your hands off of me! Adam: J.R., I -- I know --
3	20	A	D	B	C	Dad, she was naked underneath that robe, and you think I don't get it? Adam: Son, I had to. J.R.: What was the problem,
3	20	A	I	B	C	to scare her, but I was out of options and I just had to get back to Ryan. I thought if I could just do my -- Jesse: What
3	20	A	J	B	C	Gillian, are you there? Jesse: Another one of them damn psychics. We get those clowns up in through here all the time. They're like cockroaches.
3	20	A	C	B	C	in through here all the time. They're like cockroaches. You can never get rid of them. Frederick-'s-voice Gillian? Are you still there? Gillian: Yes,
4	20	A	J	B	C	you don't understand. I have to see her -- # Opal: Ryan, get your hands off of Frederick. I mean it. Now, stop it!
4	20	A	B	B	C	Opal: I'm going to call you a cab, Honey. You got to get home and get some rest. Ryan: No. No, no, I really
4	20	A	D	B	C	going to call you a cab, Honey. You got to get home and get some rest. Ryan: No. No, no, I really need to talk
4	20	A	I	B	C	don't think so, Dad. I'll do my time and I'll get on with my life. Adam: You won't have a life. With a
4	20	A	I	B	C	Hello? # Man: Destination, sir? J.R.: Yeah. How far can I get on this? Man: Probably almost anywhere. Just pick a destination. J.R.: It

4	<u>20</u>	<u>A</u>	I	B	C	know -- Jake: I'm going to tell you, Hayward's not going to get away with it. Joe: Jake? Jake? Come on. Jake: Hayward,
4	<u>20</u>	<u>A</u>	J	B	C	Come on. Jake: Hayward, you're guilty and you know it. Vanessa: Get your crutch off my son! (Judge-pounds-gavel) Jake: You're going down! You're
4	<u>20</u>	<u>A</u>	I	B	C	objecting? Don't you hate David? Do you really want to see him get away scot-free? What kind of message is that sending to your son? #
4	<u>20</u>	<u>A</u>	D	B	C	word of it. Kaye: I know what you mean. I much prefer to get a read on people in the flesh, eye-to-eye. Don't you? Adam:
4	<u>20</u>	<u>A</u>	J	B	C	plans have changed. J.R.: Where are we going? Liza: We're going to get Colby and the nanny from the lounge, and then I'm taking you home
5	<u>20</u>	<u>A</u>	I	B	C	head? You got a cop on every corner looking to bust you. You get thrown back into the cooler, you know what happens to you? Your pal
5	<u>20</u>	<u>A</u>	I	B	C	Martin -- I'll keep your family safe, and I'll make sure you get back to them in one piece. But you pull any stunts, all bets
5	<u>20</u>	<u>A</u>	I	B	C	squat. All right. You're all set up here. I got to get back to the courthouse before Ms. Kane realizes her driver's gone AWOL.
5	<u>20</u>	<u>A</u>	D	B	C	Kane realizes her driver's gone AWOL. Oh, by the way -- you get any more bright ideas, I got one of my guys stationed down at the
5	<u>20</u>	<u>A</u>	J	B	C	boy scout. Chris: Good. Tad: Chris? Chris: Yeah? Tad: Would you get word to Dixie for me? Chris: I'll do better than that. #
5	<u>20</u>	<u>A</u>	L	B	C	have me do, Dixie? Dixie: You could go talk to the judge, get her to reverse her ruling. Adam: How do you propose I do that?
5	<u>20</u>	<u>A</u>	I	B	C	Dixie? Dixie: Hi. Jake, I'm -- I'm just going to get out of here. Jake: All right, listen. I understand. Just let

<u>5</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>A</u>	L	B	C	things. Erica: So how did you manage this? How did you manage to get the charges dropped? David: I didn't manage anything. You heard the judge
<u>5</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>A</u>	F	B	C	Dixie: That was for you and me, hmm? Tad: Well, don't get me wrong -- I'm not complaining -- but what are you talking about?
<u>5</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>A</u>	F	B	C	will happen, I promise you. His victory in court today is going to get him so arrogant and egocentric that he's going to get careless and he's
<u>6</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>A</u>	C	B	C	today is going to get him so arrogant and egocentric that he's going to get careless and he's going to slip up. And in the meantime, you
<u>6</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>A</u>	L	B	C	of the feds, and this great big bed. And if that doesn't get your imagination going, you're in big trouble. Tad: Trust me, this
<u>6</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>A</u>	I	B	C	hey, hey! Greenlee: Stop it! Leo: You lost, Jake! Joe: Get away! Get away! Leo: Accept it! Ha-ha! David: It's all
<u>6</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>A</u>	I	B	C	! Greenlee: Stop it! Leo: You lost, Jake! Joe: Get away! Get away! Leo: Accept it! Ha-ha! David: It's all right. Leo
<u>6</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>A</u>	I	B	C	Mom. Joe: Let's go. Jake: I'm all right. Let's get out of here. Joe: Come on. Ruth: Come on. Let's just
<u>6</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>A</u>	J	B	C	Joe: Come on. Ruth: Come on. Let's just -- Vanessa: Let's get him out of here. Jake: You're a big man, Leo. Leo:
<u>6</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>A</u>	I	B	C	right. Joe: All right, all right. Come on, come on. Get out of this courtroom. # David: Take it easy. Greenlee: Leo? David:
<u>6</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>A</u>	F	B	C	your cool like that saved both our behinds and then gave me the chance to get you alone in my chambers again. Adam: Kaye, Kaye, Kaye? Kaye:
<u>6</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>A</u>	?	B	C	it's not going to happen. Kaye: Oh, good. Playing hard to get . Oh, I should've kept those handcuffs. Adam: Kaye, Kaye,

6	20	A	D	B	C	names. Yeah. Should I peek? Yeah? All right. Let me get a couple. Tatania, Queen of the desert. I like that. It
7	20	A	L	B	C	Adam: Stuart, I just have to handle a few things, call Barry, get him to put some legalities in motion while we're gone, that's all
7	20	A	I	B	C	you is capable of? Anything you eat or drink in this place I could get to because I own the joint, and I have lots of insurance. And
7	20	A	J	B	C	. # Marcus: I want to kiss you, but I don't want to get you in trouble. Is something wrong, Rosa? Rosa: Did your mother enjoy
7	20	A	I	B	C	n't do that. And you know that. That's why you tried to get to me through Opal. That's why. Baby -- Baby, we did
7	20	A	D	B	C	her again. Rosa: What? Marcus: She called me, and I went to get her. I brought her to the beach to talk her down. And that
7	20	A	J	B	C	for? Mia: What's that? David: Tabloid. What are they trying to get out of me, and how much are they paying you to get it?
7	20	A	D	B	C	trying to get out of me, and how much are they paying you to get it? Mia: Is it so hard to believe that you're the most interesting
7	20	A	L	B	C	you? Adam, you slept with her. You slept with the judge to get David Hayward to go free. Adam! Adam: Shh, shh! All right
7	20	A	H	B	C	he wanted. Or else I'd have to stand by and watch my son get arrested and watch them take his future away from him before he ever started.
7	20	A	J	B	C	called dumb, Honey. So, come on -- who's paying you to get something on me? (Phone-rings) David: Oh. Maybe it's your boss. Mia:
8	20	A	C	B	C	nothing? I'm surprised. I'm surprised. Listen, if you do get sick, I doubt anybody will call 911. Much like your date, no

8	20	A	D	B	C	, out of the blue. Mateo: Good luck. Rick: Thanks. You'll get another guy. Mateo: All right. Rick: Take it easy. Mateo: All right
8	20	A	C	B	C	Gabriel: What about Rosa? Shannon: Listen, if you don't want her to get hurt, get her away from Marcus now. # Marcus: What? What is
8	20	A	J	B	C	Rosa? Shannon: Listen, if you don't want her to get hurt, get her away from Marcus now. # Marcus: What? What is it? I
8	20	A	B	B	C	you can't come with me. Not yet. Ryan, save yourself. Get up! Get up and go! Save yourself! Go! Ryan: Gillian --
8	20	A	B	B	C	come with me. Not yet. Ryan, save yourself. Get up! Get up and go! Save yourself! Go! Ryan: Gillian -- # Tad: Come
8	20	A	D	B	C	she in a rush? I mean, did she say anything? Did she get a phone call? Agent: I didn't hear the phone ring Tad: Well,
8	20	A	I	B	C	-- that doesn't make any sense, you know? She just wouldn't get up and leave and not wake me up. Are you sure that nothing was
8	20	A	I	B	C	. Tad: And what? Agent: So she left. Tad: I've got to get out of here, you know? This is not right. Either something to
8	20	A	B	B	C	Thanks. Chris: Enjoy. Edmund: All right. Listen, I've got to get back and check on the kids. I just wanted to say hi. Mateo:
9	20	A	H	B	C	work to do. Shannon: But I'm telling you, she's going to get messed up bad. Gabriel: From Marcus? Is Marcus going to hit her like
9	20	A	C	B	C	J.R.: I've missed so many rehearsals lately, the guys took a vote to get rid of me. Tad: Oh, I'm sorry. That stinks. Well
9	20	A	I	B	C	you know, all three of you are at home waiting for me when I get out of this place. We're going to be a family again. Soon

9	20	A	I	B	C	., I know this is hard to believe, but we are going to get through this. J.R.: I don't believe it, Tad. I don't
9	20	A	E	B	C	tonight. I'm Chris. Woman: Brianna. Chris: Hi. What can I get you? Wait. How about a Chardonnay? Brianna: Yeah. Hey, Rick
9	20	A	I	B	C	a little hot. Ken: See? I knew even the great Marcus couldn't get up that. Marcus: Shut up, man. Next time I'm with her
9	20	A	I	B	C	, man, back off. Gabriel: I'm just trying to help. Mateo: Get out of here. Mateo: What was that about? Rosa: I don't know
9	20	A	B	B	C	(Crash) Mateo: Stay here. Rosa: Gabriel, what is wrong with you? Mateo: Get back inside. Get back inside! What the hell is wrong with you?
9	20	A	B	B	C	. Rosa: Gabriel, what is wrong with you? Mateo: Get back inside. Get back inside! What the hell is wrong with you? # Gabriel: Man,
9	20	A	I	B	C	Mateo: What were you doing in the back room? Gabriel: I was trying to get through to h! Mateo: You can't push yourself on people. You understand
1	20	A	I	B	C	You're too much trouble. I'll send your things to Wildwind. Just get out of here. And you stay away from my sister, or you'll
1	20	A	I	B	C	has ever seen, and we've just got to do a little work to get back there. Dixie: Yeah, Tad gave me this necklace to remind me of

References

- Corpus of American Soap Operas. COCA. Retrieved from <http://corpus.byu.edu/soap/>
- Get. (1996). Webster's universal unabridged dictionary. (p. 802-803). New York, NY: Barnes & Noble.
- Get. (n.d.). In Spanish Dictionary online. Retrieved from <http://www.spanishdict.com/translate/get>
- Get. In Online Etymology Dictionary. Retrieved from <http://etymonline.com/>
- Google Books Ngram Viewer. (2013). Retrieved from <https://books.google.com/ngrams/info>
- Koffi, Ettien 2015. *Applied English Syntax: Foundations for Word, Phrase and Sentence Analysis* (2nd ed.). Dubuque, IA.: Kendall Hunt Publishing Company.